642 necessary for its formation led to the frequent prolongation of political crises by interminable party bargaining.

565 665 It is important to bear in mind that the vast majority of the inhabitants of these countries are, and have always been, peasants. Under the Tsarist régime they were ardently nationalist, and, as long as the supremacy of the Baltic Barons endured, there was also a marked tendency to Socialism. After the establishment of independence, the agrarian reforms energetically prosecuted by all three States brought into existence a large new class of small peasant proprietors, and land-hunger, the chief incentive to revolution, was virtually abolished. The Agrarian parties grew steadily stronger at the expense of the Socialists and Centre groups,[1] while Communism —now that it was associated with Soviet Russia and all that Russian domination might involve—became practically extinct as a significant force.

Given, on the one hand, the state of parliamentary atrophy described above, with its probable accentuation of the economic and financial difficulties of the period, and, on the other hand, the increasing predominance of the Agrarian parties, influenced possibly by the success of the Pilsudski *coup* in May 1926 and the German National-Socialist victory in 1933, an outside observer might be tempted to describe what has happened in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as a victory, in each case, of the peasant parties over 642 the Socialists, or of Fascism over parliamentary anarchy. Each of 186 the dictatorships, it is true, depends largely on the prestige of one 178 or two veteran statesmen, on the loyalty of the Army, and on the tacit acquiescence of the mass of the peasantry. It is also true, perhaps, that in each country an anti-foreign and anti-Semitic agrarian nationalism is becoming more and more pronounced, and, furthermore, that there is a common tendency on the part of the responsible leaders to favour the introduction of corporative institutions—although how far such an innovation would be likely to modify the existing concentration of powers it is as yet too soon to judge. But it would be misleading to stress the parallelism between the three States too much, or to conclude that the present authoritarian régimes employ the same methods and operate in the same interests in every case.

642 In Estonia, the Agrarian dictatorship of M. Paets was the last stage ● 579 of a race between the parliamentary groups and the extra-parliamentary and semi-Fascist organization, known as the 'Liberators'

[1] In Lithuania the strength of the Socialists never exceeded 17 per cent. of the whole *Seimas*; but in the other two countries the Left groups, although they were at first numerically stronger than the Agrarian parties and had played a prominent part in framing the Constitutions, participated in a quite disproportionately small number of Governments, and diminished in strength fairly steadily in successive elections.

League', to impose on the country their rival brands of constitutional reform; whereas in Latvia the protagonists were, on the one hand, the Agrarian party—itself accused of Fascism—with proposals for reform, and, on the other, the Socialists with an anti-Fascist but otherwise unconstructive programme. Moreover, the dictatorship in Estonia has operated more mildly, and departed less radically from constitutional principles, than its counterpart in Latvia. 642 578

Lithuania, again, had problems peculiar to herself. Here a religious issue cut across the straight fight between Nationalist-Agrarian and Socialist. Lithuanian nationalism demanded the restoration of Vilna; but the Vatican had recognized that province as a Polish diocese. The Christian-Democrats, who were as much a clerical as an agrarian or nationalist party, were therefore divided between two loyalties. The *coup d'état* of 1926 was executed by a group of officers in favour of the Nationalist party—a small Conservative group of landowners and industrialists—at a time when the Populists and Socialists were in office; the Christian-Democrats at first supported the Voldemaras dictatorship, owing largely to prolonged ill-feeling between the Nationalist Government and the Vatican, but they ended by going into permanent opposition, and under the Tubelis Administration were suppressed altogether. More recently the Memel dispute gave rise to some discontent, this time among the peasants, among whom there was a feeling that their interest in good trade relations with Germany was being sacrificed to a policy of extreme nationalism. None the less, the dictatorship has continued for nearly eleven years, and is only now beginning to show signs of modification; presumably, the pressing need for national unity, imposed first by the Vilna dispute and later by the Memel controversy, must be counted as the primary cause of the prolonged supremacy of a régime which appears to rest not so much—as in Estonia and Latvia—on its power to satisfy the needs of an important agricultural class, as on the support of the Army, the ability of a small group of intellectuals, and the immense personal prestige of President Smetona. 642 578 186

2. Estonia

Political Parties. The table of election results below[1] shows a striking shift of numerical strength from the Left and Centre parties to the Right, which consisted of the Agrarian party, or Peasants' Union, reinforced after 1923 by the New Farmers or 'Settlers'. These were the representatives of the new class of peasant proprietors created by the agrarian reforms, and became, in 1932, the left wing of a United Agrarian party. 665 [575]

The Agrarian party consisted chiefly of farmers who had owned

[1] See Table 6 at foot of next page.

1; Anonymous U-4 (no date) 1938 RB1 Baltic States RB1
Estonia

665 [196] and formed the Workers' Party, or 'Kaaver-Socialist' group, secured six seats. In 1930 this group was dissolved and its seats distributed among the other parties, while the Communist party had already been declared illegal after a *putsch* engineered from Moscow in December 1924. The solidarity of the nation against Communism was illustrated by the energetic suppression of this *putsch* by General Laidoner, and the formation of a grand coalition of all the major parties, including the Social-Democrats, under Dr. Jaakson. Martial law, which had been proclaimed throughout the country, was thereafter retained permanently in certain frontier zones and on all railways; and, although during the following years plots were from time to time discovered, Communism never again got out of hand to the extent of being a national danger.

642 *Constitutional Reform.* As early as 1924 the question of constitutional revision was raised by Dr. Jaakson in his Ministerial Declaration immediately after the Communist *putsch*, when he suggested the desirability of separating the functions of the President of the State from those of the Prime Minister. Bills to that effect were unsuccessfully introduced in the Assembly by the parties of the Right in February 1925 and July 1926, while the Labour party tabled a [666] separate Bill in 1926 for halving the number of deputies in the Assembly; in the same year the Assembly actually adopted a modification of the electoral law, requiring a deposit from every candidate and a minimum of two successful candidates for representation of any group in the Assembly.

668 642 The year 1930 saw the genesis of a speedily repressed peasant 'Lapuan' movement in South Estonia, somewhat on the lines of its Finnish prototype, but without the latter's anti-Communist character. This organization expressed its dissatisfaction with parliamentary 'absolutism', talked of a march on Tallinn, and proposed to petition for the reduction of the number of deputies and the diminution of their salaries. A far more important movement was set on foot in March 1931 by the Ex-service Men's Federation, which passed a resolution demanding the institution of a President of the State with extensive powers, an electoral system which allowed for votes for individuals instead of for lists, and the reduction of the number of deputies, with the threat that, if the Government did not accede to these requests within three months, the Federation would proceed to a popular referendum.

578 642 There now began a three-cornered struggle between the Agrarian and Centre parliamentary groups, which favoured moderate reform; the Ex-servicemen—henceforth known as the 'Liberators'—who demanded far wider powers for the President of State than the former were willing to concede; and the Social-Democrats, who were opposed

to the institution of the office of President in principle. In August 578 ●
1932 a Bill creating the office of President and reducing the number 642
of deputies to eighty, which had been adopted by the *Riigikogu* in March, was rejected in a referendum by 330,236 to 315,900 votes. A second and somewhat similar Bill, passed by the *Riigikogu* in February 1933, suffered an overwhelming defeat in a referendum held in the following June, about 67 per cent. of the votes cast being against it—the defeat of both projects being due as much to the opposition of the Socialists as to that of the Liberators.

The Government were therefore obliged to allow the Liberators to put their own proposals to the public vote; but, in the meantime, they extended the emergency law (a mild form of which had applied to certain districts ever since 1924) over the whole country, suppressed all extremist organizations of both the Right and the Left Wings, including the Liberators' League—which by now had cast its nets wide and was believed to have connexions with the Nazi party in Germany, and even augmented the quorum necessary for the acceptance of the Bill. In spite of these precautions the Liberators' project was approved, in the referendum held on October 14–16, 1933, by 416,000 votes to 157,000. Thereupon M. Tõnisson's Government resigned, and M. Paets formed a non-party Cabinet.

The Dictatorship. What was virtually a new Constitution thus 643
came into force on January 24, 1934. To the new office of President of the State, for which elections were to be held every five years by direct and universal suffrage, were attached extremely wide powers, including the conduct of home and foreign policy, the appointment and dismissal of officials, and the initiation of legislation. The President was to appoint the Cabinet, and could dismiss it; he could adjourn the *Riigikogu*, which was now reduced to fifty members—or could dissolve it and hold new elections; he had the right of absolute or suspensive veto on all legislation, and in case of necessity could declare a state of emergency, and promulgate draft laws as decrees.

Pending the presidential elections, which were fixed for April, 642
M. Paets assumed the provisional presidency. The campaign for the 661
nomination of candidates was in full swing, and the chances of the Liberators' candidate, General Larka, appeared very favourable,[1] when, suddenly, on March 12, M. Paets proclaimed a state of emergency on the ground that the Liberators were planning a Nazi *putsch*. Martial law was declared for six months, and General Laidoner was appointed Commander-in-Chief. All party activities were forbidden, the Liberators' organizations were dissolved, and some 500 of their

[1] In January the Liberators had gained an overwhelming victory in the municipal elections; the results of these were annulled, however, after the *coup* of 1934.

tendency, and sympathetically regarded by the German minority. 665 There was also an extreme nationalist and Fascist organization known as the **Pehr Konkrusts Society**, while the **Aizsargi**, the para-military organization of the Peasant Union, was also becoming increasingly Fascist in tendency.

In 1933 began a struggle between the Socialists on the one hand, 578 ● and M. Blodnieks' Agrarian-Right-Centre coalition on the other, 665 which ended in the *coup* of May 1934. In August 1933 an extraordinary session of the *Saeima*, summoned on the Socialist party's initiative, rejected a Socialist Bill for the dissolution of all Fascist organizations, the dismissal of Fascist officials, and the expulsion of German Nazis from the country.[1] On the other hand, the *Saeima* also rejected a proposal to send to committee a Bill tabled by the Peasant Union in October, which would have enlarged considerably the powers of the President of the State. On March 2, 1934, the Blodnieks Government fell as a result of a disagreement between the Peasant Union and the New Farmers over financial policy, and M. Ulmanis, the leader of the Peasant Union, formed a coalition of his own party, the bourgeois parties of the Right and Centre, and most of the minority groups.

Shortly after the *Saeima* had voted for the dismissal of all Nazi 661 or Fascist officials employed by the Administration or by local 578 government bodies, M. Ulmanis proclaimed a state of emergency on May 15, and ordered the dissolution of the *Saeima*, the cessation of all party activities, and the imposition of martial law for six months.[2] A strict censorship of the press was established and troops were stationed in various parts of Riga. A Government manifesto gave as justification for these measures the fear lest the internal tension due to the interminable party conflicts, and the failure of the Peasant Union's proposal for constitutional reform, should lead to a state of civil war. A new Government, alleged to be non-party and to consist of experts, was formed on May 17, with M. Ulmanis as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister,[3] and General Balodis as Minister for War. All municipal councils were suspended, and new mayors appointed.

The chief victims of the *coup* were the Socialists, a number of who 661 leaders were arrested on charges of possessing illicit arms,[4] although i

[1] In the autumn, however, the Government did forbid the wearing of uniforms b political organizations, and dissolved all athletic associations within these organizations, including the 'Workers' Sporting Club'. [2] It was later prolonged indefinitely.

[3] In July 1936 M. Munters was appointed Foreign Minister.

[4] In the court martial held on these men in November Dr. Kalnins (formerly Speaker of the *Saeima*) was acquitted, but his son, Bruno, the leader of the 'Workers' Sports League', was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. A further trial of Socialists was held in April 1936 on charges of organizing an illegal revolutionary movement called the Socialist Labour and Peasant Party.

support of the Army and of the President, he was obliged to resign his post on September 19, and, although he subsequently made several attempts to seize the reins again,[1] he never succeeded in doing so.

The Tubelis Administration, 1929–1938. President Smetona now invited his brother-in-law, M. Tubelis, to form a Cabinet which, with certain alterations, has remained in office to this day; M. Zaunius became Foreign Minister, while M. Rusteika retained the post of Minister of the Interior which he had held under M. Voldemaras. For a time the prospects of a return to normal political life seemed brighter. Political prisoners were released and dismissed officials reinstated; party leaders who had gone into voluntary rustication returned to the capital; in December 1929 even the ban on the Social-Democratic party was raised, although the press censorship was strictly maintained. The first provincial and municipal elections since the *coup* were held in June 1931,[2] and on December 11 an electoral college, chosen by district assemblies of the new local government bodies, met to re-elect M. Smetona as President for a term of seven years.

Opposition to the Tubelis Government steadily accumulated, however, on all sides. The persecution of the Social-Democrats continued, and by 1932 the last of the trade unions was dissolved; there was also friction, from 1931 onwards, between the Government on the one hand, and the Christian-Democrats, morally supported by the Vatican, on the other;[3] and in November 1935 both the Christian-Democratic and the Populist parties were dissolved by a decree which was confirmed and extended to all Opposition parties in February 1936. The unsuccessful attempts to stage the return of M. Voldemaras, made by small groups of officers in June 1934[4] and in January 1936, bore witness to a certain amount of disaffection in the Army. More serious were the peasant strikes which broke out in the Suvalki district in August 1935 and the spring of 1936, and the workers' demonstration and strike in Kaunas in June 1936, when the troops had to be called out, and a state of siege was proclaimed in the city. The reshuffle of the Cabinet in September 1936, when new appoint-

[1] In consequence of a series of intrigues he was banished to the country in July 1930, and the 'Iron Wolf' was dissolved in the following August. He was tried and acquitted on a charge of conspiracy in August 1931, and on a charge of misappropriation of funds in September 1932. After the failure of a *putsch*, organized by certain Army officers in June 1934, owing to the loyalty of the majority of the Army and to President Smetona's refusal to negotiate with the insurgents, M. Voldemaras was sentenced by court martial to twelve years' penal servitude on charges of high treason and of accepting assistance from a foreign Power (i.e. Germany). In February 1938 he was granted an amnesty, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Lithuania's independence.

[2] They were boycotted by the Opposition parties, however, on account of certain restrictions on the franchise.

[3] See above, p. 40.

[4] See footnote above.

642 361 in which case elections must take place within six weeks. The administration is entrusted to a Directorate of five members, who must be citizens of the Territory; the President is appointed by the Governor, and himself appoints the other members, but the Directorate holds office only so long as it possesses the confidence of the Diet.

648 504 It is stipulated in an Annex that the Lithuanian Government shall conform to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles concerning the Niemen; that the port of Memel shall be considered as a port of international concern, and subject to the recommendation adopted by the Barcelona Conference; and that the harbour shall be administered by a Harbour Board consisting of three members, appointed respectively by the Lithuanian Government, the Memel Territory, and the League's Communications and Transit Organization.[1]

648 361 It is important to note that the Memel Convention is not an instrument of the League of Nations, although members of the Council may draw the attention of the Council to any infraction of its provisions, and Lithuania undertakes to submit all disputes between her and the other signatories to the Permanent Court of International Justice, whose decision is binding. Moreover, apart from the recognition of German and Lithuanian on the same footing as official languages, the Minorities Declaration made by Lithuania respecting the rest of her territories applies to Memel also. Unlike Danzig, however, Memel is placed under the guarantee of the four Allied Powers signatory to the Convention, and not under that of the League.

642 361 578 *The Working of the Convention, 1925–32.* The Constitution thus imposed on Memel created an extremely difficult situation. It became clear after the first elections to the Diet, when twenty-seven Germans and only two Lithuanians were returned, that the great majority of the population was anti-Lithuanian in sympathy. Yet the Governor appointed by the Lithuanian Government was expected to choose a Directorate having the confidence of the Diet. If he did so, he was bound before very long to lose the confidence of the Government at Kaunas; if he did not, his rule was unconstitutional. The result was that events in Memel tended to repeat themselves in a more or less regular series. Elections were usually followed at first by a period of relative calm; then came a phase of conflict between the Diet and the Governor, accompanied by frequent changes of Directorate; this was terminated by the dissolution of the Diet, and a period of unconstitutional administration by the Governor; finally Germany would appeal to the League Council, and the Governor

[1] The League nominee is to give special attention to international economic interests, but must not be a national of any riparian State of the Niemen; thus Lithuania gained her point in the dispute as to whether Poland should be represented on the Board.

1: Anonymous U-4 (no date)1938 RB1 Baltic States RB1
Lithuania

would feel compelled to allow new elections. Between 1925 and 1933 this cycle recurred three times. 642 361

Between 1925 and 1927 three Directorates fell in quick succession owing to no-confidence votes by the Diet, until, in February 1927, the Governor dissolved the Diet and carried on the administration by a Directorate of his own nomination. As a result of an appeal to the League Council by Germany,[1] new elections were held in August, when the German parties lost four seats to the Lithuanians.[2] 578●

A peaceful phase followed the elections of 1927, owing to the fact that M. Voldemaras' anti-Polish policy inclined him towards a *rapprochement* with Germany; but, with the rise to power of his less Germanophil successor, M. Sleževičius, in 1929, and with the introduction of a high tariff on agricultural produce in Germany in 1930, tension increased again. During 1930 the Diet twice voted no-confidence in the Directorate, and in August it was dissolved by the Governor, Colonel Merkys. Complaints referring to the prolongation of martial law, which had been extended to Memel on its introduction in Lithuania in 1926, and to various alleged violations of the Constitution, were now addressed to the League Council by members of the Diet and by Germany. The latter, however, withdrew her petition after conversations between the German and Lithuanian Foreign Ministers. 648 361 642

Again, after the elections of October 1930, in which the Lithuanians won five out of the twenty-nine seats, there was a comparative lull,[3] owing to the appointment of Herr Böttcher, a German Memellander, as President of the Directorate. In December 1931, however, the Lithuanian Government accused Herr Böttcher of acting unconstitutionally in conducting negotiations with a foreign Power during a private visit to Berlin. In spite of receiving a vote of confidence from the Diet on his return, Herr Böttcher was arrested, and an entirely Lithuanian Directorate was appointed on February 6, 1932. Germany then brought the matter before the League Council, which adopted a report emphasizing the 'absolute necessity' of establishing without delay a Directorate enjoying the confidence of the Diet, but virtually transferred the responsibility for handling the dispute to the Allied Powers. When the Diet voted no-confidence in a new Directorate headed by a Lithuanian, M. Simaitis, the Government

[1] For an account of the disputes between Germany and Lithuania over the question of procedure in petitions to the Council, see I. F. D. Morrow, *The Peace Settlement in the German-Polish Borderlands* (Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 446–8.

[2] Probably owing to the emigration of thousands who opted for German nationality.

[3] In May 1931, however, Germany laid before the Council complaints over financial questions and over the continuance of martial law. The former were finally settled by a Financial Agreement signed on August 18, 1933; the latter was left to be handled by the Allied Powers, who in June 1931 addressed a joint Note to the Lithuanian Government recommending the abolition of martial law, without any result whatever.